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ABSTRACT

It is important to counteract the collectivist and totalitarian trend which is currently the source of our educational problems. These problems are due to the impersonal, institutionalized communication which results from totalitarianism and collectivism in education. There is now a new movement toward personalism which focuses on love, community, critical consciousness, radical re-thinking, and anarchy, and which characterizes a trend away from the impersonal, functional, totalitarian approach to life. This personalist philosophy which has arisen from a dissatisfaction with established institutions can be discussed in relation to the socio-economic realm, the political scene, science, philosophy and theology, and finally, American education, which has ignored the personalist movement. The first step of a plan to de-sociologize American education would be to de-socialize schools (i.e., take them out of reach of political authorities). The second step is to de-sociologize education--in other words, to organize the contents and direction of our educational efforts around concrete reality and not according to the pre-established ideology of sociology. The goal of education must not be to alienate man from his existential roots but to make him able to pursue happiness through desocializing and de-sociologizing our schools. (BD)

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I.

The prevailing theme in recent educational literature seems to be failure and inadequacy of American schools. Among the various solutions offered, Illich's proposition to de-school society has been widely discussed. This paper wants to throw light upon some aspects which do not appear in the controversy clearly enough: there are possibilities to re-construct the schools on the basis of a personalist philosophy. The author believes that it is most important nowadays to counter-act to the collectivist and totalitarian trend which is the source of our educational problems.

The issue is too complex to be treated in the limited framework of a paper. The main objective must remain therefore to challenge the discussion among those who are concerned with the future of our schools.

II.

TOTALITARIANISM AND COLLECTIVISM IN EDUCATION

What we call school today is a far cry from the original idea of SCHOLE, the Greek concept of leisure that characterized eduction from its inception. Our schools are no longer the leisurely ACADEMIAE where wisdom and the experience of the older is handed over to the younger generation in personal dialogue. We have our doubts whether our schools do bring up our children to the current level of civilization in the "accelerated process" of which Hegel spoke. Contemporary schools stand rather for compulsory work, for national cohesiveness, and not too rarely for ideological indoctrination; the products are likewise not so much enlightened and cultivated personalities but all too often half-educated barbarians. The objectives of education have become functionality, adjustment, and certification, not so much wisdom and the pursuit of happiness.

This is not only so in totalitarian systems. The collectivist trend appeared already in the Puritan society of New England, in Horace Mann's

view of the "great equalizer and balance wheel", and much more visibly in our times, in the degradation of our teachers into functionaries of a system that does not allow much for professionals. For example, if a teacher wants a pay raise, it requires "collective bargaining", if he wants a day off, he has to go through the "proper channels", etc. While there is no other proper channel than personal communication, we have been conditioned to the point that we see no alternatives to institutionalized communication. The cry for radical abolishment of institutions can be understood as a normal reaction to this situation.

III.

THE REACTION: PERSONALISM IN CONTEMPORARY LIFE

Illich's propositions are consistent with the contemporary "counter-Enlightenment" (as the Europeans label our Zeitgeist) and its call for a return to an anthropocentric philosophy that allows man to "do his own thing". The focus on love, community, critical consciousness, radical re-thinking, anarchy, etc. characterizes the trend away from the impersonal, functional, and

totalitarian approach to life.

The personalist philosophy may have been discredited by the extreme positions of romanticists, fundamentalists, anarchists, and the like. It is nevertheless the same dissatisfaction with the established institutions that have corrupted, which made already a Rousseau, a Pestalozzi, and a Thoreau advocate a "return" to a more human and natural life.

There are many symptoms of a personalist Zeitgeist. They appear now in all sectors of life:

a. In the s o c i o - e c o n o m i c realm, an increasing resistance against manipulation through the "hidden persuaders", the emergence of consumerism, and particularly the critical attitude against government, unions, economic giants, and the institutions of society in general, are clearly reactions against the totalitarianism of which Marcuse speaks in his book One-dimensional Man.[1]

b. On the p o l i t i c a l scene, the "ethnic renaissance" which proved the melting pot to be a myth, and the ostensive loss of credibility

of the governing authorities are no less serious reactions to a nationalism that had led to the irresponsible war enterprises of this century and the discrimination of large portions of our population. Now, für the first time, the public demands a look into the personal lives of candidates for government positions, our young people defy the government's rights to enter into their private lives. The tendency is obvious even though it may be a long struggle: to rehumanize the political system and to put it back into its subsidiary role, i.e. to help man in the pursuit of happiness.

c. In S c i e n c e, many of our colleagues seem still to have missed to notice the revolution that took place when Einstein and Heisenberg entered the scene. How else could Skinner find such a followership with his antiquated concept of a mechanistic and deterministic science? Quantum Mechanics and the New Science have brought back the fundamental concepts of subjectivity and potentiality into a science that had been narrowed in by the dogma of a "scientific method" based on observation and a false certainty.

We realise now how much we were led into trouble by those scientist who had fallen victim to the temptations such as utilizing collected data on human behavior for planning life in all its aspects. The task of the behavioral sciences, specifically of sociology, all of a sudden has turned to "provide meaning for human existence". This means nothing else but a claim to replace philosophy. The sociologists have indeed become the "priests" of our time, preaching the gospel outside of which there cannot be salvation. But there is a strong reaction arising, particularly in Europe with the books of Schelsky and Wurm[2]. It will gain momentum in this country too, in the near future.

d. In P h i l o s o p h y and T h e o l o g y, the existentialist and romanticist movement have left language analysis and de-mythologizing behind. Our people read other things than our papers which we produce for meetings at our learned societies! The young generation worries less about meanings of words and symbols and more about the meaning of life and death, of love, communcation, and morality. The growing interest in the irrational is a symptom for the movement

away from systematic and doctrinal philosophies to a personal and subjective Weltanschauung. When so many do not find truth and happiness in this pursuit, it is partly our guilt! We have remained bystanders instead of taking issue with the primitivistic ideologies of a Karl Marx, Mao Tse Tung, and others who have fascinated and misled so many of our young people. We have indeed not addressed ourselves sufficiently to the real problems of our time, instead we analysed language and did mental gymnastics.

It is nevertheless promising that increasingly the ideas of a Teilhard de Chardin, Ignace Lepp, Carl Rogers, etc. are picked up and widely discussed.

e. American e d u c a t i o n has surprisingly ignored the personalist movement, in contrast to Europe. The trend towards "individualized instruction" and the "open classroom" does not contradict this statement. Neither of these two approaches make schools more personal but only more effective. Here, we have only the application of sociological patterns which have become an ideology.(See also above,page 5.)

The ideas of a Carl Rogers, though widely read and discussed, have not yet found entrance into

many of our schools. The emphasis on achievement and "behavioral objectives" is still strong. But we hear voices again that remind of Pestalozzi who shouted at the pedagogues two hundred years ago: "When a child does not like school -- it is a jail! When the teacher is not liked -- he is a jail-keeper! When the pupil does not like what you teach him -- it is not education but punishment!"[3]

They took it serious over there, but for most of our colleagues here, this was too "romantic and simplistic". Except for some development, particularly in socialist-run countries, the European schools did not encounter such massive failure and drop-out figures as we have them. The school of the Old World have achieved a fine balance between the aesthetic (Anschauung) and the functional (Leistung). In other words, European education have prevented the over-emphasis on academic or intellectual training. They combined the humanistic and vocational goals. The results are known to most of us. Has not America imported so many "products" of these schools because they were not only better trained but also more reliable, punctual, and motivated?

Already in 1963, Admiral Rickover pointed to some of these things in his book American Education - A National Failure.[4] We did not heed his advice though. With the some recent exceptions, the achievement level of European schools rank considerably higher than those of our public schools. You will hardly find any school vandalized over there. One of the reasons why youngsters have a more positive attitude towards school is the fact that they are not kept that long in it: as a rule, classes are only in the mornings. Also, schools are smaller and have smaller class sizes. It seems that we would have to look into this direction if we truly want to get out of our school misery.

IV.

CONCLUSION : DE-SOCIALIZING AMERICAN EDUCATION

Paulo Freire insists that education can never succeed when it is "invasion". This means that extending the demands from society to the students is an imposition from outside while education is essentially a process which starts only within the educand, with the student's

personal experience. This is exactly what Pestalozzi wrote (and applied) two hundred years ago:

> "The sphere of knowledge from which man in his individual station can receive happiness is limited: its sphere begins closely around him, around his own self, and his nearest relationships. From there, his knowledge will expand, and while expanding, it will regulate itself according to this firm centre of all powers of truth."[5]

We obviously adhere to the opposite view: that knowledge starts with a pre-existing culture and an established society to which an individual should adjust as fast as possible. We pull our children from the "a-social" state of childhood into the process of socialization at the earliest possible stage. Piaget called this the "typical American question": how can we accelerate the development of a child? and he has criticized our dogmatic belief that personality, character, and the pursuit of happiness are validated only when they fit into our cultural, political, and ideological patterns. This priority of social adjustment and functionality over the free pursuit of happiness is one of the foundations of socialism!

Whether we like it or not, John Dewey's philosophy of education has the same roots as Marxism. American education has been on the path of socialism and collectivism long enough and it is high time that we become aware of it, and do something about it if we want to preserve freedom.

The first step to do would be to de-socialize school, i.e. to take them out of reach for political authorities. The consistent application of the cardinal principle of subsidiarity which allows no unnecessary interference of any institution, particularly government, in the activities of people would and could restore the responsibility of parents and communities and keep the bureaucratic machinery out of education. The question whether any government is competent to run an educational system must be raised again. It is an undisputed fact that smaller institutions can handle this task far better, cheaper, and more efficiently. In quite a few other countries of the free world, they have found ways to provide at least for alternatives by financing all schools -- private and public -- from the general taxes without exercising undue control. This safeguards against any totalitarian

monopoly in education. Our reservations against such an involvement of tax money in private education does no longer make sense! Originally, this was meant to prevent any close tie between an established religion and the state, but what we arrive at when our private school systems disappear is the very opposite: it would mean that the government does no longer guarantee the free pursuit of happiness but determine what type of happiness the citizens would have to pursue!

Secondly, we must de-sociologize education. Sociology as an ideology cannot and must not determine our school curriculum![6] In other words, the contents and direction of our educational efforts should be organized around concrete reality and not according to some pre-established ideology. The "concentric circles" which Pestalozzi used as the pattern for a meaningful curriculum start with the immediate environment in which a child grows up (Heimat, home-world) and expand through the neighborhood, city, country, into the whole world. However wide the circles become, the firm point of refe rence will always remain

this first circle, the Heimat. This has been recognized by Pestalozzi way before our sociologists and psychologists began to speak of alienation and rootlessness. Our recent ethnic renaissance shows that these roots remain intact even through generations and survive all attempts of creating a meltingpot.

The point we have to see here is that the goal of education cannot be to alienate man from his existential roots but to make him able to pursue happiness. After so many attempts by various systems -- political, religious, educational -- it should have become obvious that no institution can provide happiness, how often it may promise to do so, but only help to pursue it.

The fervent reaction against the planners and enforcers of "happiness" in this country, and the momentum of an anti-sociologism in Western Europe are healthy signs that give us hope. Even police and supreme courts cannot prevent that people insist on their inalienable right to determine the direction of education of their children. We still may have a long road to go, but if we educators remain critical enough and do not give up to

provide responsible leadership, welcome or unwelcome... To prevent the demise of our already weakened democracy, our concern must go on desocializing and de-sociologizing our schools. Only when the original idea of SCHOLE -- freedom, leisure, happiness -- comes through again in our schools will we "build a new social order".

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[6] Cf. A.L. Fanta, "Modernization and its Discontents: An Essay in the Sociology of Knowledge with Implications for Schooling", in: The International Foundations of Education Quarterly, Vol.1, No.3 (Summer 1975).